

Chairperson Osten, Chairperson Horn and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. My name is Charles DellaRocco. Since 2019 I have been a State Animal Control Officer. Prior to this I was police officer in the State of Connecticut since 1994 as well as combat veteran. I stand in opposition to SB258 the removal of Animal Control vehicles as being considered police vehicles which would require them to have a dashboard camera.

Connecticut Animal Control Officers are not the dog wardens of the past. They don't drive around looking for stray dogs or cats with a net to capture and place them into animal jail. Their job is much more detailed. They are required to enforce laws much like police officers within their jurisdiction. As a matter of fact, CGS 22-330 states this.

Connecticut General Statutes require that every town have an Animal Control Officer. And that every Animal Control Officer has arrest powers. In Attorney General Opinion 86-045 the Honorable Joseph Liberman goes on to say that Animal Control Officers may enforce both the civil and criminal provisions contained in Chapters 435, 436, and 436a. In addition, they may issue complaints and summons or make arrests for the violations of any animal law relating to dogs or to any other domestic animals contained in any other chapter of the Connecticut General Statutes. They are involved in situations that escalates into more serious situations than just answering a barking dog complaint.

Animal Control Officers are broken down into three categories. State and Regional Animal Control Officers, Municipal Animal Control Officers who are part of a Police Department and Municipal Animal Control Officers that are not part of a Police Department. It is the Municipal Animal Control Officers who are not part of a Police Department I would like to talk about.

Most of these ACOs are not equipped with a uniform, radio, computer, phone, ballistic vest, defense weapon, records management system and the use of the COLLECT system. Some of these ACOs don't even have uniforms, nor body cameras and are required to use their own vehicles.

The Police Accountability Bill was designed to protect the public we serve while also protecting the officers who serve the public. A win win situation, right? How can this be if Animal Control Officers are not given the tools to abide by a law that was constructed to make police accountable. I have been told numerous times that this law does not pertain to Animal Control Officers. Well, that is just not true.

Here are the facts: Animal Control Officers are police officers under CGS7-294a(9) and the units that they belong to are law enforcement units under CGS 7-294a(8)

In 1993 a question was presented to the AG's Office by Chief William Knapp, who was the Executive Director of POST, asking if individuals receiving their law enforcement powers pursuant to certain statutes required police officer training and if so whether the authority to train falls under the provisions of POST. Senator Blumenthal, who was the Attorney General at the time, stated that per CGS 22-330, State Animal Control Officers are to be POSTC Certified and

that Municipal Animal Control Officers aren't because within CGS 22-331 training and all other requirements can be waived.

In Attorney General Opinion 2013-006, Attorney General Jepsen, confirmed the findings of Attorney Blumenthal Opinion 93-028.

Just recently, The Office of Legislative Research addressed Animal Control Officers and PA 20-1. In the research report released on November 15, 2021 and identified as 2021-R-0107 it explains that all animal control officers are affected by the bill in one way or another. It confirms that ACOs are police officers under the statute and their units are law enforcement units under the statute.

There is even D'Amico v. Willis a Connecticut State Appellate Court decision which confirms that Animal Control Officers are police officers under the statute.

I know it's probably money thing. But it just doesn't make any sense. Don't water down this requirement. The bill was designed for a reason. If you are going to enforce the bill, enforce it on everyone. Animal Control Officers should be given the tools, which include training and equipment, to accomplish the mission with compassion for the people we serve and the animals we protect.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.